

NOAA hurricane specialists, including National Hurricane Center director Rick Knabb, Ph.D., will provide information to residents of vulnerable communities about hurricane preparedness and resilience. Tours of the Air Force Reserve Command's WC-130J "Hurricane Hunter" will offer an opportunity to learn how scientists collect hurricane information.

"Several Caribbean countries were severely damaged last year by Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Otto," Knabb said. "Another season is just weeks away and we have to be prepared. Simply hoping one of these storms won't hit your community is not a good plan."

Locations, all local airports, and local times for public tours are:

- April 24, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. – Merida, Mexico
- April 25, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. – San Pedro Sula, Honduras
- April 26, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Grand Cayman
- April 27, 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Turks and Caicos
- April 29, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Aquadilla, Puerto Rico

During hurricanes, military air crews fly state-of-the-art WC-130J aircraft directly into the core of tropical cyclones to gather data that are critical for forecasting a hurricane's intensity and landfall. The data are sent in real time via satellite from the aircraft directly to the National Hurricane Center for analysis and use by hurricane forecasters.

"This data is vital in improving storm track models, which plays a critical role in alerting coastal residents about potential hazards," said Lt. Col. Kaitlyn Woods, 53rd WRS chief meteorologist.

"The Caribbean Hurricane Awareness Tour educates the public not only about our mission but also of the importance of being prepared."

During the 2016 hurricane season, the 53rd WRS flew 75 missions, including 12 investigative flights over the Atlantic, for the National Hurricane Center. It also flew one mission over the eastern North Pacific and 14 over the central North Pacific. The eastern North Pacific hurricane season begins May 15 while the central North Pacific and Atlantic basin hurricane season begins June 1.

Aside from Knabb, also participating in the tour will be Lixion Avila, Ph.D., NOAA NHC senior hurricane specialist; and U.S. Air Force reservists from the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (WRS), 403rd Wing, Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Miss.